

Grand Master explains 'Full Recognition' of Prince Hall Lodge

I've heard some talk about "Full Recognition" of Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Washington and a letter from Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Oregon requesting "Full Recognition."

What Is This "Recognition" Thing Grand Lodges Do?

I do not take credit for the words or ideas that I am about to use regarding this subject. Only the arrangement of them. An issue of some importance is about to receive our consideration at the 1996 Grand Lodge Communication and I have the feeling it would be an extremely good idea for us to become better educated on the subject of the title of this article so we might better cast a vote for the good of Freemasonry. We must also consider the impact of our decisions on the Masonic condition. A friend gained at the expense of a friend lost is sometimes a price too great to pay. We must carefully test the balance on the scale of Brotherly Love and Friendship. It is one matter to make a decision regarding the affairs of our own household and quite another when we enter the household of a Cousin. We are, after all, talking about "family affairs" when we speak of Masonic Recognition. What I have to say about this issue is more than can be absorbed at one sitting so my approach is going to be to divide this into two (2) editions of the Masonic Tribune of February & April. I hope you gain as much from my explanation of the issue as I have from the study of it.

The condition of recognition of Prince

our experience, knowledge and understanding of Masonic principles, have earned the right to travel to distant lands and to prove we are qualified to be welcomed as true Brother Master Masons. Unfortunately, in today's world not all Masonic bodies can be assumed to be "regular" or "legitimate" and therefore eligible to receive Masonic Communication and Light. **So, we seek recognition in order to facilitate visiting among Lodges in our own and other legitimate Masonic jurisdictions.**

Second, What constitutes recognition?

Recognition is the formal acknowledgment of the Masonic character and acceptability of the Masons of another jurisdiction. Such recognition, when established, makes Masonic intercourse possible between Grand Lodges, Constituent Lodges, and the Masons that belong to those Lodges, according to the definition and specific terms of the particular mutual recognition. Section 1.08 B.L specifies the criteria for recognition in the jurisdiction of Washington. **"Recognition of Foreign Grand Lodges.** The basis of recognition for a foreign Grand Lodge shall be that such Grand Body:

1. Shall have been legally formed by at least three regularly constituted Lodges, or chartered by some legally authorized body of Masons to act as a Grand Lodge;

2. Is self governing, responsible and independent, with undisputed authority over its symbolic Lodges conferring the first three degrees of Freemasonry, and not subject

shall be displayed the Three Great Lights of Masonry."

THIRD, What criteria is used to define Masonic Character?

Each and every Masonic jurisdiction is governed by Masonic Law. However, thanks in great measure to the wisdom of George Washington a national level of Freemasonry was avoided and the obligation, right, and duty to govern the Craft in the various States was left in the hands of the respective jurisdictions. In other words, the highest level for the government of Freemasonry in any given jurisdiction is the Grand Lodge of that jurisdiction. As a result, Masonic Law has evolved in various States, Territories and Nations in a varied manner. One common "yardstick" is the Established Standards for Recognition of the Conference of Grand Masters "Commission of Information For Recognition" published in 1952. It is beautiful in its simplicity in that only three basic, though broad, criteria must be satisfied. **First,** The legitimacy of origin of the proposed Grand Body must be established. **Second,** Exclusive territorial jurisdiction except where shared by agreement must be honored by the proposed Grand Body. **Third,** The proposed Grand Body must adhere to the Ancient Landmarks, specifically an unalterable and continuing belief in God, the Volume of the Sacred Law as an indispensable part of the furniture of the Lodge, and the prohibition of the discussion of religion and politics.

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The condition of recognition of Prince Hall Grand Lodges is what has prompted my writing. It is my intent to recommend "Full Recognition" of Prince Hall Grand Lodges of Washington and Connecticut and to provide you with the information you need to respond to the request of Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Oregon Inc. for "Full Recognition". Their situations are similar in some respects but in many ways very different. With one we are dealing with members of our own Washington Jurisdiction exclusively and with the others we are entering the domain of another family, closely related but still from a different branch of our existing Masonic Family. Some have suggested that these issues should be covertly addressed but I decided I lacked the authority to withhold a letter addressed to the Masters and Wardens although only originally mailed to the Grand Lodge Office. The method of resolving the issues raised by the letter should be decided by the recipients of the letter. I have great faith that their judgment is at least as good (and perhaps better) than my own.

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Lodges, according to the definition and specific terms of the particular mutual recognition. Section 1.08 B.L. specifies the criteria for recognition in the jurisdiction of Washington. **"Recognition of Foreign Grand Lodges."** The basis of recognition for a foreign Grand Lodge shall be that such Grand Body:

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2. Is self governing, responsible and independent, with undisputed authority over its symbolic Lodges conferring the first three degrees of Freemasonry, and not subject to or holding divided jurisdiction with a Supreme Council or any other claiming to have ritualistic or other control over the symbolic degrees;

3. Requires that the membership of the symbolic Lodges under its jurisdiction shall be composed of men only;

4. Requires that each candidate for the degrees of Masonry shall express a belief in a Supreme Being;

5. Requires of its Constituent Lodges a strict adherence to the Ancient Landmarks, Customs and Usages of the Craft, as set forth in the constitution adopted by the Grand Lodge of England in 1723, except insofar as they have been modified since that date by the United Grand Lodge of England or by this Grand Body;

6. Shall have no Masonic relations of any kind with mixed Lodges or Bodies which admit women to membership;

7. Obligates its initiates on the book of the Sacred Law;

8. Prohibits the discussion within the Lodge room of any and all religious or sectarian doctrines, or of any political subjects; and 9. Requires that when at work, in either Grand or Constituent Lodges, there

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Legitimacy of Origin

In the time of colonization of the United States there were four (4) forms by which Grand Lodges could be erected. **First**, by a "Declaration of Independence" by a Provincial Grand Lodge that later evolved into an independent Grand Lodge, **second**, if no Provincial Grand Lodge existed a Convention of Lodges resulted in the formation of a Grand Lodge, **third**, a General Assembly of Masons (with no Lodge or Provincial Grand Lodge involvement) decided to form a Grand Lodge, and **fourth**, was the granting of a Charter by a Mother Grand Lodge. This was a very rare occurrence.

Today, with little Provincial expansion occurring there are generally **two** ways a Grand Lodge can be formed. **First**, (and most common) the formation of a Grand Lodge by three or more existing, just and legally constituted Lodges chartered by an already recognized (by most other jurisdictions) Grand Lodge or a group of two or more Grand Lodges. Most Western Lodges evolved in this way, tracing their origins variably and in combination to Kansas, Nebraska, California, Colorado, Oregon

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From the Senior Grand Warden's Desk

What a great privilege it is to serve the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Washington. Many Masons forget that the term "Grand Lodge" encompasses all members of the Fraternity. Indeed it would be incomprehensible to think that the Grand Lodge did not serve all Masons.



Therein lies our greatest challenge. There are days when I don't even agree with myself let alone all the Masons I know, or even one of them! We have several charges that tell us to have but one aim, to please each other: To unite in the grand de-

sign of being happy; to spread the cement of brotherly love and friendship that unites us into one common band of friends and brother, among whom no contention should ever exist, except that noble contention of who can best work and best agree.

I find that many times frustration comes from always looking at ways for others to improve, and not appreciating the many things that they do which are commendable. Even looking at ourselves we often overlook the ways of overcoming our own shortcomings.

I recently read a book about the author who had literally made thousands of dollars teaching self-improvement. Two of his important points were: 1) Count our bless-

Recognition Discussion . .

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Washington and Prince Hall Washington among others.

It is noteworthy that most of the preceding Grand Lodges trace their heritage to the Grand Lodges of Virginia (1778), North Carolina (1787), District of Columbia (1810). **Second**, (and less common) is the creation of a Grand Lodge by another Grand Lodge. In this country, the Grand Lodge of Tennessee formed by the "Great Charter" from the Grand Lodge of North Carolina was the only example I could locate. The formation of Grand Lodges in foreign lands has followed so many different forms that a separate study might prove informational.

Exclusive Territorial Jurisdiction

The **second** criteria usually considered necessary in determining recognition is that of "Exclusive Territorial Jurisdiction". The "American Doctrine" is sometimes cited as example of this. The American Doctrine provides that when three or more chartered Lodges exist in any State or Territory, in which no Grand Lodge exists, those Lodges have the right to organize a Grand Lodge which is authorized to assume authority over all Masonic or Masonic Lodge activity within their jurisdictional boundaries and no other Grand Lodge can, in any way, interfere with its jurisdiction by establishing new Lodges or maintaining those already established. Washington's practice has been to allow maintenance of established Lodges by agreement with the host Grand Lodge as conditionally agreed in the Grand Lodge formation process. During the

bility, or obligation to more than one Grand Lodge, or to any other dividing authority, Supreme Council, or Masonic control of any kind.

Further, under this concept, no Grand Lodge will extend its authority into, or establish Lodges in, any territory occupied by another Grand Lodge without the express consent of the host Grand Lodge. A Grand Jurisdiction is a well described set of boundaries that circumscribe, in their entirety, all of the Lodges and their respective members within those limits. The Fellowcraft Degree discusses the Geometric concept of length, breadth, and thickness. In Washington, the length and breadth of our jurisdiction is well defined by our Masonic Law and extends to the extreme east, west, north and south boundaries of the State of Washington and part of the State of Alaska. But what about thickness? Thickness is of sufficient magnitude to include all of its Constituent Lodges in Washington and Alaska but not thick enough to encroach, in any way, upon the other Grand Lodges in existence in Washington and in Alaska.

Critical points are that Grand Lodges must have exclusive jurisdiction of their Constituent Lodges, the Grand Lodge must not attempt to extend its authority into already established Lodges or otherwise interfere in a territory occupied by another lawful Grand Lodge without the expressed consent of that Grand Lodge and that each Grand Lodge has complete authority to share its jurisdiction with other Grand Lodges, if it decides it is appropriate and desirable to do so.

Ancient Landmarks

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I recently read a book about the author who had literally made thousands of dollars teaching self-improvement. Two of his important points were: 1) Count our blessings and thank God every day for what we have; and 2) Look at ourselves every day and find ways in which we can improve and to consider what progress we have made in becoming better.

Sounds to me like the daily custom of one illustrious in Masonic history.

If there is a point here, it is that often we overlook the obvious in our attempts to do things differently or "Better." Perhaps a few more moments contemplating the lessons of our Fraternity will furnish us with the answers needed to improve our work.

As this Fraternity was perfected in such unanimity and concord, so may it long continue!

Congratulations to all my brothers who have moved into positions of leadership throughout our great Fraternity.

Tom Ehlers, Senior Grand Warden

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It's easy to identify people who can't count to ten. They're in front of you in the supermarket express lane.

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By the time a man realizes that his father was right, he usually has a son who thinks he's wrong.

provides that when three or more chartered Lodges exist in any State or Territory, in which no Grand Lodge exists, those Lodges have the right to organize a Grand Lodge which is authorized to assume authority over all Masonic or Masonic Lodge activity within their jurisdictional boundaries and no other Grand Lodge can, in any way, interfere with its jurisdiction by establishing new Lodges or maintaining those already established. Washington's practice has been to allow maintenance of established Lodges by agreement with the host Grand Lodge as conditionally agreed in the Grand Lodge formation process. During the 1800's there were numerous conflicts between jurisdictions where more than one Grand Jurisdiction existed within a State or Territory but by the end of the 19th century most of those conflicts had been resolved.

In reality, there are as many definitions of "exclusive jurisdiction" as there are Grand Jurisdictions but generally a common cord passes through the definition. In any Grand Jurisdiction there can be but one Grand Lodge with responsibility for independent, self governing, sole, and exclusive authority over the Constituted Lodges within its jurisdiction.

The exclusive jurisdiction concept has evolved over the centuries from a number of causes. Some Grand Lodges have provided for sharing a jurisdiction in their Grand Masonic Law as deemed appropriate and necessary. The Washington/Alaska situation is an example of this. Again, a common thread is that Grand Lodges are the sole, recognized, exclusive authority over the Craft in its Constituent Lodges. Viewed from the reciprocal, no Constituent Lodge can hold any allegiance, responsi-

the other Grand Lodges in existence in Washington and in Alaska.

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Ancient Landmarks

It is generally considered that adherence to Ancient Landmarks of Freemasonry is essentially necessary. The Grand Lodge of Washington requires such an adherence but chooses to allow the Ancient Landmarks themselves to define what they should be. We have not accepted or rejected any specific Landmarks but they are considered by most to be the highest in ranking of authority and importance and they are defined as "laws or customs" that have existed beyond the memory of men. I will leave the discussion of these for a later time.

(to be continued in the April edition)

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Source:

Washington Masonic Tribune. Volume 1, number 4. February 1996